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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the historical evolution of the post of Chief Education Officer in the education systems of the English-speaking Caribbean, looks at the demands placed on office holders over the last several years, and, against this background, suggests areas in the preparation of senior educational administrators that seem to merit attention in the foreseeable future. The historical review reveals that during the development of Ministries of Education in the Caribbean nations differences emerged in the roles of Chief Education Officers related to policy formation and decision making. Profiles of Chief Education Officers from the Eastern Caribbean show the impact of the experiences and other characteristics of these administrators on the definition of their roles. The growing social and political demands on these administrators have further affected their roles. These factors make the complete professional preparation of Chief Education Officers a necessity. This preparation should provide understanding of political, economic, and social forces and goals; knowledge of communications and human relations; and thorough training in supervision and management. Continuing education based on the pragmatic requirements of evolving conditions should also be available to these administrators. (PGD)

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THE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION OF SENIOR EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS IN THE CARIBBEAN CONTEXT

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This paper outlines the historical evolution of the post of Chief Education Officer in Caribbean Education systems, looks at the demands on office holders over the last several years, and, against this background, suggests some of the areas which seem to merit attention in the preparation of senior professional officers/educational administrators in the English-speaking Caribbean in the foreseeable future.

The Evolution of the Post of Chief Education Officer

Around 1945, the chief administrators and supervisors in Caribbean educational systems were a small band of Directors of Education and rather more Inspectors of Schools who were responsible to local legislatures through Boards of Education for conduct of their countries' schools. Tremendous power was concentrated in the hands of these functionaries, chiefly with respect to the elementary schools. In a few cases, Inspectors of Schools combined supervisory duties in respect of elementary schools with the post of Headmaster of the local Grammar School, but where this was not the case, the Grammar School sat somewhere outside the Inspectors' control, except through their influence on its Governing Body.

It was against this background that Dr. Eric Williams could write around 1945, "Under the existing system in the British West Indies, primary education is distinct from secondary, and secondary from vocational. The Director of Education is responsible for the first, a commission for the second and possibly a board of industrial training for the third .... The establishment of a single authority will reduce confusion, make for a better articulated system and lend prestige to those types of education that are now disparaged."[1]

The Mayne Commission report[2], published in 1945 also recommended that there should be an officer "with the function of supervising education as a whole, who should have sufficient staff to free him from the more mechanical details of administration" and that there should be a Committee of Public Instruction whose function "should include the proper evolution of education policy to meet the economic and social needs of the community."

In the last 25 or 30 years, the search has been on in English-speaking Caribbean countries for a single educational authority which would make for a better articulated system in which educational policy would be evolved to meet the economic and social needs of the respective mini-states. In the earlier part of this period it was the Director of Education's responsibility to do so, but, for the most part, this scenario has been worked out under the Ministerial system of Government and some analysis of what this has meant to the role of the erstwhile Director of Education--now Chief Education Officer--is necessary.

Before the establishment of the Ministerial system, Directors of Education were left, for the most part, fully in charge of most of the administrative policy, personnel management and resource allocation in the educational system--particularly its elementary sector--as long as they did not disturb the balance

of power between the classes in respect of access to educational opportunity, and the socialization functions which schools were expected to perform. With the coming of the Ministerial system most of this changed. The Minister of Education assumed responsibility for framing the educational policy of the government and ensuring its effective execution under the general mandate of the policies of the political party to which the Minister belonged.

The development of the Ministerial system has also meant the sharing of responsibility not only in policy-making, but in certain aspects of system-management with a cadre of senior administrative officers led by the Permanent Secretary. Many Permanent Secretaries have assumed, or tried to assume, either through their own desire to demonstrate that they are the most important members of the administrative chain of command, or through direct encouragement from the Ministers of Education themselves, advisory or decision-making functions which Chief Education Officers assumed to be theirs--thereby making for a tense and often conflicting situation. In a few situations Ministers of Education have functioned as "super" Permanent Secretaries. The net result is that the Chief Education Officer has invariably functioned in an ill-defined and ambiguous situation.

In respect to broad policy formulation, Chief Education Officers have sometimes been regarded even by some Ministers of Education, as being mainly responsible for carrying out the educational policy framed by the Manifesto of the political party to which they belong, Cabinet or the National Planning Unit.

Within the Ministry of Education itself, the Chief Education Officer might find himself subordinate to senior administrative officers, i.e. Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary or to the Educational Planner of the Ministry of Education's Planning Unit on important matters of educational policy. With respect to the development of the tertiary level sector, the Principal of a tertiary level institution might make greater inputs into the development of educational policy for this sector than the Chief Education Officer. Chairmen of Secondary School Boards and of tertiary institutions might have as much direct access to the Minister and the Permanent Secretary as the Chief Education Officer himself on matters affecting these institutions. Yet, the public and the teaching profession tend to hold the Chief Education Officer and his senior professional colleagues responsible for the general direction of educational policy and major decisions taken by the Ministry of Education. As far as they are concerned it is these officers who advise the Minister of Education.

In some situations, Chief Education Officers are kept more or less to the functions of a supervisory nature or to administrative policy, which was traditionally a part of the role of the erstwhile Directors of Education. With the growth of more direct controls over all aspects of the educational system by the Ministry of Education, there has been no automatic growth of functions of Chief Education Officers throughout the region in respect of all aspects of the system. From Government to Government, Minister to Minister,

Permanent Secretary to Permanent Secretary, the Chief Education Officer, despite being named as the Chief Executive in most Education Acts, finds himself having to lay claim to and defend his professional "turf". Where the problem is most acute, it would be tempting to speculate whether the perception which the Chief Professional Adviser brought to the post, or the way in which he functions, or his inability to escape, being consumed by routine functions, might not be contributory factors.

Ironically, in at least one case where the Chief Education Officer was seen by an Opposition political party to be in full control of the system, the diminution of the powers of that officer was made a platform issue during an election campaign. It is also worth noting that in about four instances, where there was a temporary fusion of the post of Permanent Secretary and Chief Education Officer, it was the Chief Education Officer who assumed both posts, though it is by no means certain that those who made the decision saw the post of Permanent Secretary as being the one which was in abeyance. Even in 1985, the question has been raised, in a number of territories, whether the post of Chief Education Officer is really necessary.

The point of the above is that there is little consensus across Ministries of Education in the Caribbean about the role of the Chief Professional Officer, except that there are important management and supervisory functions he must perform in relation to the primary and secondary schools. His role in respect of policy evolution and many aspects of the decision-making process is somewhat more tenuous. Clearly though, there have been cases over the last few years where Chief Education Officers with high levels of technical knowledge, a strong professional image, sound management skills and well honed political skills have made a difference, but we should not underestimate the complexity of the situation in which many of these officers have functioned.

Profiles of Chief Education Officers

A look at the background of chief Education Officers in Barbados and seven Eastern Caribbean territories might be, at least, instructive and suggestive of reasons why these senior education administrators have not always been perceived as being central to policy and decision-making in their respective territories. Based on the information available to the writer, of the 28 Chief Education Officers who have held office in the Eastern Caribbean over the last 20 years, at least 19 have come to this office via primary teaching experience, Headship of a Primary School and the Inspectorate of Schools, four via secondary school teaching, secondary Headships and the Inspectorate. Another five have been secondary school masters. Of the Chief Education Officers who held office during the last two decades, about 12 took up their posts without first degrees and most of the 28 had no formal training in educational administration at the Master's degree level at the time that they became Chief Education Officer.

Of this group of Chief Education Officers, in addition to their primary or secondary teaching experience, about five had also worked as Lecturers in Teachers' Colleges or as Teachers' College Principals, one as a Lecturer in a University and few, if any, in any other form of tertiary education. About six had no previous experience working in a Ministry of Education.

Essentially therefore, this group had, based on their successful teaching experience either at the Primary or Secondary level, been promoted to some form of administrative post and had worked their way up to the post of Chief Education Officer. Few had adequate academic or professional preparation and many had limited experience working at high levels of the public service--which often put them at a disadvantage in some aspects of public service administration when compared with their administrative colleagues. Their main advantage was knowing the schools from the inside and having mastered some of the craft of administration--both of which are of tremendous value to the senior education administrator. While no special claims are being made for graduate level training, it must be borne in mind that in the Caribbean setting most administrators function in an environment in which there is limited access to the books and journals which might make up for lack of formal graduate training and little informed public discussion on professional issues.

No firm conclusions can be drawn from these profiles, except that little in the training and experience of many of these senior administrators had prepared them adequately for the wide-ranging roles they would be expected, or would find it necessary, to perform. For the most part, even where their experience was useful, they invariably found their knowledge and skills somewhat deficient and worse, that the pressures of office left them little time for reading or for attending short courses which are essential to professional development on the job.

Those who were fortunate enough to bring or to acquire at some stage in their careers, a sound professional and administrative preparation found that they had to use this "capital" for a substantial portion of their careers. The occasional conference or seminar may have helped, but the time for follow-up was extremely limited. The opportunity for continuing professional development is therefore somewhat limited.

Given the rapid turnover of Ministry of Education staff in some territories, the pressures of working in Ministeries, a salary structure which often fails to attract really able and experienced professionals, and the ease with which potentially good senior education administrators seem to get promoted to the general administration stream of the public service, recruits for this post in most territories in the forseeable future will perhaps come with first degrees, and with some academic preparation in education or educational administration at the Master's level, but with limited on-the-job experience at high levels of the Ministry of Education. Few seem likely to come to the post of Chief Education Officer having developed important skills of the craft of educational administration at the system level, knowledge of many aspects of the system, and the qualities of judgement which are critical to officers at the highest level.

The Demands on the Chief Education Officer

The demands on the professional knowledge and administrative and supervisory skills of the Chief Education Officer as well as on his professional-political relationships have increased significantly over the last 20 years. His has been the task of dealing with the increased demand for educational provision, improved access to educational opportunity, closer linkage of education and socio-economic development and its implications for curriculum reform, development of technical institutions and adult and non-formal education. Teachers and their representatives have kept the system under pressure for better supervisory techniques and improved personnel management, to keep in step with the changing industrial climate in our societies. In addition, there has been pressure for terms and conditions more in accord with the I.L.O. conventions and with those of teachers in school systems in more developed countries.

Much curriculum development activity, including myriad curriculum development projects, have strained the absorptive capacity of the systems he manages and taxed his coordinating ability. External aid agencies are everywhere; and this sometimes is a mixed blessing. As has been well said[3] "The poorer the country, the more it depends on the outside world for accomplishing even modest development objectives, and this dependence, which is normally on multiple actors, tends to get in the way not only of coherent planning but also of consistently implementing that which has been planned." Amidst the many pressures on his time, the many conferences and discussions on projects, the Chief Education Officer's problem is how to keep on top of the system and to direct its mainstream functions.

In the foreseeable future there will be pressure towards reform in areas we had come to take for granted, the organization of the school day, the length of the school day itself, teacher utilization and disciplinary procedures in schools. In some countries and at some levels of the system, parents will try to exert more pressure on school management and will seek to enforce their legal rights. The Chief Education Officer will be under increasing pressure to assure principals and teachers of their rights in this new situation in which it sometimes appears that only the parents and the students have rights.

Indications are that issues will continue to include the relevance of curricula and of the educational system, questions of equity and access, the role of science and technology in the country's overall development, and the further expansion and/or modernization of secondary and post-secondary education. The relationship of the University of the West Indies to the rest of the tertiary level system will figure prominently in deliberations about the relevance of sectors of the educational system.

More concern will be expressed about the costs of education, and the Education sector will have to compete for resources with Health and Infrastructure development rather more than in the past. Educational policy will come under

greater public scrutiny and as the pressures for accountability increase there are likely to be even stronger tendencies towards centralization and bureaucratization than at present. For the good of education, Chief Education Officers now and in the future will need to have the strength to be bulwarks against the monolithic tendencies of the present era.

Politicians, Trade Unions, the Business Community, Teachers' Unions, Parents, Students, other interest groups and the media can be expected to try to have a greater say in educational policy and in the way in which that policy is implemented. This is to be expected, for education is, by any definition, an intensely political matter. It is about the allocation of social status and privilege, the allocation of public resources and the question of social control.[4]

In fact, many of the senior professional and administrative personnel need to appreciate, rather more than seems to have been the case in the past, that the business of education is about political choices, resource related conflict, and that the educational system depends on a wide and complex set of political conditions. Some senior education administrators find the resulting environment in which they function bewildering, and must be helped to deal with the new dynamics and with issues which have the potential of becoming a major source or object of social and political conflict.

Roles and Functions of Chief Education Officers: Implications for Training

The foregoing should at least help us to put the roles and functions of the Chief Education Officer in perspective; to recognize the implications for his initial and continuing preparation; and, perhaps also, to recognize those areas in which training per se might have a limited impact.

Clearly, we are dealing with a functionary who must have a wide range of professional knowledge and skills in a wide variety of areas. It is not that the same high level of competence can be expected in fields as diverse as School Organization and Management, Curriculum Development, Measurement and Evaluation, Educational Technology, School Business Management, School Architecture, School Mapping and Public Service Personnel Management practices; but the Chief Education Officer must have a solid core of professional knowledge from which to tender sound professional advice, and he must have a sufficient working knowledge of a large number of fields which impinge on his job for him to enter into fruitful working relationships with a wide variety of specialists and to make sound recommendations based on their specialist advice.

At the very least, the Chief Education Officer is the chief professional adviser; personnel manager; human resource development officer; chief developer of administrative policy; educational planning and implementation officer; decision-maker; manager of the system's material and human resources; coordinator of the educational system; programme developer; organizational developer; educational reformer and manager of change.

Today's Chief Education Officer must have a fundamental understanding of the relationship between education and socio-economic development. He must understand the political dynamics of educational policy and planning since he must plan an important role in the educational system's responsiveness to new demands on it. He must understand the role of educational planning in the decision-making and implementation process, as well as the constraints--some political--and difficulties in the implementation of a given educational plan. He must understand how political imperatives dictate the ways in which both planning and implementation proceed and that "the true genius of enlightened educational planning lies in how closely and effectively technical skills and political insights can be brought to bear upon the achievement of a given set of objectives."[5] He must be aware of the intersectoral nature of development planning and education's dependence for its success on a number of other social institutions. In the preparation of Chief Education Officers in the Caribbean, priority attention must be given to their understanding of educational planning and development in small states.

As the chief professional officer, the Chief Education Officer must be a stimulator of professional development throughout the education service. He is the guardian of sound educational values, the chief protector of the image of the teaching profession and the builder and restorer of its flagging morale. One of his main tasks is to promote the qualitative improvement of the educational system. He must be able to build bridges between the teaching profession or the teachers' unions and the government of the day. He must be a buffer between the political directorate and subordinate staff in the Ministry of Education as well as between principals and teachers. He is the chief liaison officer with School Boards, the public and other external agencies.

One important aspect of his business is communication. "Talk" is his "work." He must be able to argue cases successfully within the Ministry of Education and without. He must maintain a network of relationships with individuals and groups in the school system as well as in the environment.[6]

His communication and interpersonal skills must be highly developed. He must be a mediator, par excellence. He will have to spend considerable amounts of time trying to reconcile conflicting goals and competing views and interests and intervening in situations to achieve harmonious relations. He must be skilled at "working at the junction between politics and a profession." His task is to "interpret the one to the other;" to mediate between them; and "to facilitate the realisation of the visions of both worlds; so that each may be more nearly fulfilled."[7]

His ability to form coalitions, and his effectiveness in bargaining and persuasion will all be critical to his success. Many skills and great gifts are needed by senior education administrators in today's educational systems as well as great qualities of sensitivity and integrity plain "horse sense." Obviously some of these skills, professional dispositions and qualities are more easily trainable than others.

The Chief Education Officer's supervisory skills must be well developed and his managerial skills are just as critical, for he is the manager of the material and human resources of the national education system. It is important that he learns something about time management for he must not be consumed and exhausted by routine administration. He must find time to read, to think, to evaluate the programmes of the various educational institutions and their management, and to make critical interventions for the qualitative improvement of all aspects of the system. He is the system's main problem-solver and its main hope that it does not become too crisis oriented.

The foregoing should at least serve to sketch some of the comprehensive professional knowledge and the wide range of skills which training programmes should attempt to foster or which senior education administrators need to cultivate. Training can and must enlarge the administrator's perspective concerning the nature and problems of the educational enterprise, including the ethical dimensions of his job. It must offer conceptual frameworks for different aspects of the administrator's craft.[8]

As Arthur Blumberg has so powerfully argued, training must help the administrator, at whatever stage he undertakes that training, to understand the intellectual, behavioural and emotional baggage he brings with him and must help him to get a firmer grasp of his interpersonal and group behavioural style and diagnostic tendencies. "For," says Blumberg, "it is there (the administrators') perspective on the world (of education) after all that combines with their baggage and results in their behaviour."[9]

But given the wide range of knowledge and skills that we have argued for in today's senior education administrators in the Caribbean, and elsewhere, it is important that we do not lose our perspective on their training and preparation. Our first task must be to find effective ways of indentifying persons who have the qualities of intellect and personality, personal and professional commitment and capacity for further professional development which seem to be so vital for persons in such posts. Without being deterministic, we should pay attention to Blumberg's comment that much of what a person will be as a senior education administrator he already is long before formal preparation for that position occurs. Training should not be expected to remedy fundamental defects in intellect or character in those who are sselected for these posts.

Finally, we should not undervalue on-the-job experience in educational administration, especially for those persons with the "right" social orientation and capacity to learn from experience. Much of the craft of the administrator can best be learnt on the job, through guidance and from exposure to good role-models. Many qualities of judgement and political skills are learnt in the work setting, as Blumberg says, "very particularistically, at the work site."

Exposure at regional and international conferences can also help. So too can interaction with professionals in a wide variety of fields. Perhaps the case cannot be too strongly argued for senior professional officers to do short courses on-the-job to upgrade their knowledge and skills as the need arises, and more importantly, for them to be granted study leave every few years to recharge their professional batteries and to keep pace with the insights on educational development being generated by research within the Caribbean region and beyond it.

In conclusion, those of us who conduct short or long training courses for senior educational administrators at the system level must work to improve our knowledge of what it means to work in such a setting and the relevance of our programmes to the needs of those who daily try to cope with one of the most complex and demanding of jobs. We must also continue to work assiduously at improving the training methodologies we use, so as to have an even greater impact on the administrative behaviour of those we train.

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